

# *Annual Report* 2008

An annual publication of  
VA Western NY  
Healthcare System

## In This Issue

West's Wire.....	2
Batavia Updates.....	3
Institute for Healthcare Improvement ..	3
Photo Identification Cards.....	4
Planetree.....	4
Patient Centered Care.....	5
Access.....	6
Veterans Helping Veterans.....	6
Cardio-Pulmonary Fitness Center...	6
VA Care Closer to Home.....	7
Research & Development.....	8
Patient Education.....	8
Community & Events.....	9-10
Awards & Recognition.....	11-12



## Honoring All Who Served

## VA Western New York Healthcare System

Buffalo - Batavia - Dunkirk - Jamestown - Lackawanna  
Lockport - Niagara Falls - Olean - Warsaw



## West's Wire



At VA Western New York Healthcare System, we are proud to provide health care for the men and women who have given so much for us. I am pleased to have the opportunity to serve as the Interim Medical Center Director with the dedicated employees at VA Western New York Healthcare System until a permanent Director is selected.

We would like to share accomplishments and updates to our program areas in this publication. As we continue to improve health care outcomes, in 2008 our Veterans Integrated Service Network 2 received the Kenneth Kizer Award - VA's highest quality award for the fourth time and was the only Network recognized with the Carey Award for Performance Excellence! Our efforts will continue as we work on quality performance and access measures throughout the coming year.

As our newest veterans return from serving in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF), we have adapted to their needs in many ways. An OEF/OIF Care Management team has been put in place to ease the transition from military to civilian life. Some of the other enhancements include additional appointment slots to accommodate work schedules, outreach at pre-mobilization and demobilization events, addition of childrens' toys in waiting rooms, baby changing areas, focus groups, and the annual welcome home picnic. It is a privilege to serve America's heroes from all eras.

At the Buffalo site, we have implemented valet parking at no cost to veterans. In addition, employees utilize an off-site parking lot to allow for more parking spaces for our patients.

At the Batavia site, a community event to welcome home returning servicemen and women was held in May.

We served 40,992 veterans in the last year and are looking to serve more in 2009. We encourage you to tell your family and friends about our facilities in Buffalo, Batavia, and seven community based outpatient clinics. We would be honored to be the provider of choice for all veterans in Western New York.

Thank you for your support of VA Western New York Healthcare System.

David J. West, FACHE  
Interim Medical Center Director

- ★ **Our mission is to care for our veterans with compassion and excellence.**
- ★ **Our vision is to be the health care provider of choice, achieving the highest quality in health care delivery, education and research.**
- ★ **Our core values are trust, respect, excellence, compassion, commitment.**

# Batavia Updates

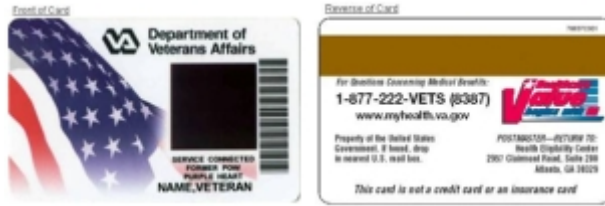
by Dennis Heberling

- Batavia continued its cultural transformation facilitating some great patient activities during the year such as a Lenten Fish Fry, Day at the Ball Park with the Batavia Muck Dogs, Night at the Batavia Downs Race Track, a Day at the Farm, Annual Senior Dinner Dance, Festival of Lights walkway, and Lodge's weekly card games. The success of the staff to create a "home away from home atmosphere" was best exhibited during the System-wide Ongoing Assessment and Review Strategy (SOARS) survey when the consultant stated she would like to move here! Batavia staff hosted several teams of employees from other VA sites who toured the Batavia facility to take home the best practices fostered here.
- Mark Francis, Voluntary Manager, led the Batavia effort to create a community celebration in May 2008 to honor and welcome home veterans. It included festivities within the community as well as at the Batavia VA. The event was well attended and received great media exposure.
- The Network 2 TelCare Call Center opened in Batavia in August. Eight staff members were hired to take questions about health during non-administrative evenings, nights and weekends.
- A "Restorative Nursing clinic" was implemented in late July. The clinic focuses on helping veterans improve and/or overcome physical limitations with some of the daily living activities such as cooking, bathing, etc.
- In May, the Jack H. Wisby Jr. Center hosted an open house to recognize the opening of 14 additional beds.
- There have been numerous visitors to the facility throughout the year. Dignitaries such as Congressman Thomas Reynolds, Former Governor Eliot Spitzer, and Assemblyman Stephen Hawley visited during National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans week. Other dignitaries also visited from New York State Gold Star Mothers, National, NYS, and County American Legion Commanders, National, NYS and local DAV Commanders, and so forth.
- One of the residents from Pine Lodge was recognized for heroics that occurred while serving over 60 years ago in WWII. He was presented service awards by Assemblyman Jim Hayes.
- The volunteers of Batavia were recognized during National Volunteer Week in April for their unending support in improving the quality of life for veterans through initiatives such as the donation of four computers and a printer to create a computer room for our residents.



VA Western New York Healthcare System participated in the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) National Forum in December. 294 employees attended the sessions that range from improving health care systems to 100K Lives and 5M Lives Campaigns. Eighteen groups submitted story boards to show their initiatives and results of systems redesign. Subject areas included: acute myocardial infarction care, emergency department patient flow, flow improvement initiative teams, best practices to prevent bloodstream, central line infections, VA nursing outcome database (NOD) overview, chaplain services, patient centered care, operating room (OR) and supply processing and distribution (SPD) process improvements, risk assessment process improvement – engineering, surgical flow improvements, government vehicles – lean thinking, ventilator bundle, preventing medication errors, comprehensive inpatient anticoagulation monitoring, bed cleaning process, intensive care unit flow, pressure ulcer prevention, skin care, and Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). The winning story board was OR and SPD process improvements, and members were honored with a pizza party.

## Photo Identification Cards



The success of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) new photo identification cards is attributed to our commitment to ensure that all veterans' personal information is protected by issuing new cards to every enrolled veteran. Workstations have been installed at our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and staff was provided training. Clinics were provided lists of patients with appointments who had not obtained a new card. These patients were sent to the Veterans Service Center (VSC) to update their information and obtain a new card. To date, 92% of enrolled veterans have received the new card. VSC will continue these efforts in the coming year as well as support outreach events.

### PATIENT SATISFACTION DATA (through August 2008, 11 months)

Facility Name	Inpatient Overall Quality	Outpatient Overall Quality	Provider Wait Time	Appointment As soon as wanted – Established Patients	Appointment As soon as Wanted – New Patients
National	79.2	78.1	76.6	86.2	87.9
VISN 2 - Overall	81.9	83.8	88.3	92.7	92.7
VA Western NY Healthcare System	77.3	80.4	84.9	92	94.4

Notes: VISN 2 is Ranked 8th (Inpatient), 1st (Outpatient), & 1st (Wait Time). Ranked 1st for best Avg. Score among 21 VISNs (ranked 1st in 2007)

## Planetree



PLANETREE

The Planetree model of care is a patient-centered, holistic approach to health care, promoting mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and physical healing. It empowers patients and families through the exchange of information and encourages healing partnerships with caregivers. It seeks to maximize positive health care outcomes by integrating optimal medical therapies and incorporating art and nature into the healing environment. For more information about Planetree please see [www.planetree.org](http://www.planetree.org)



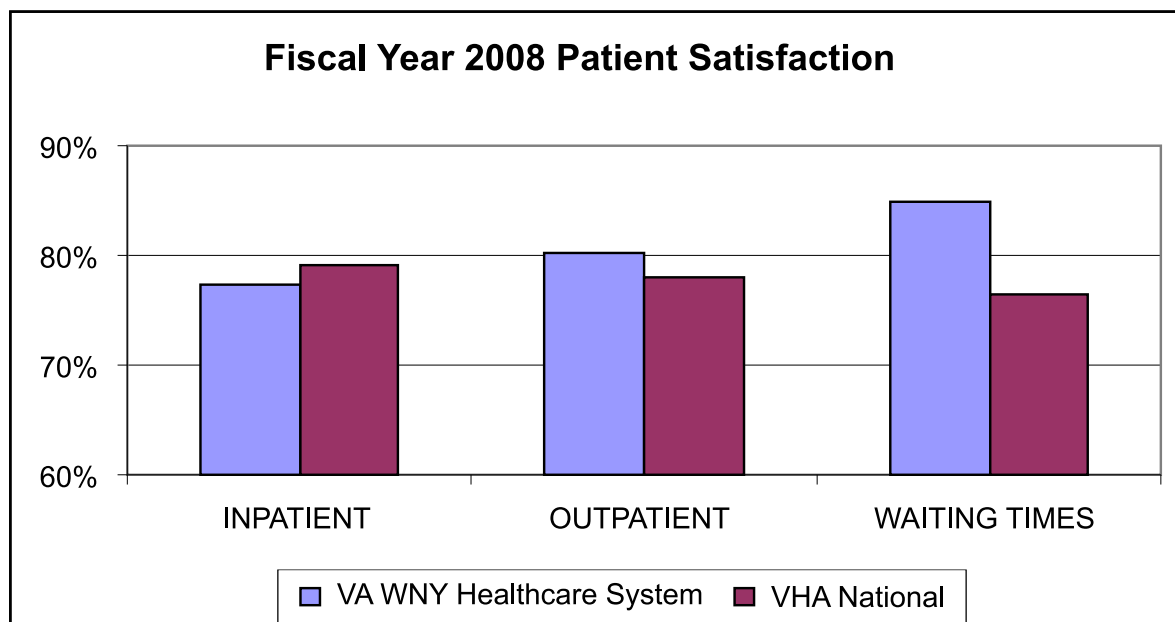
# Patient Centered Care

by Cynthia Wilson

This past year, we continued on our journey to promote Patient Centered Care at VA Western New York to its highest levels. Our mission is to care for our veterans with compassion and excellence. Providing a variety of educational opportunities to our staff is our key to success in both quality and satisfaction.

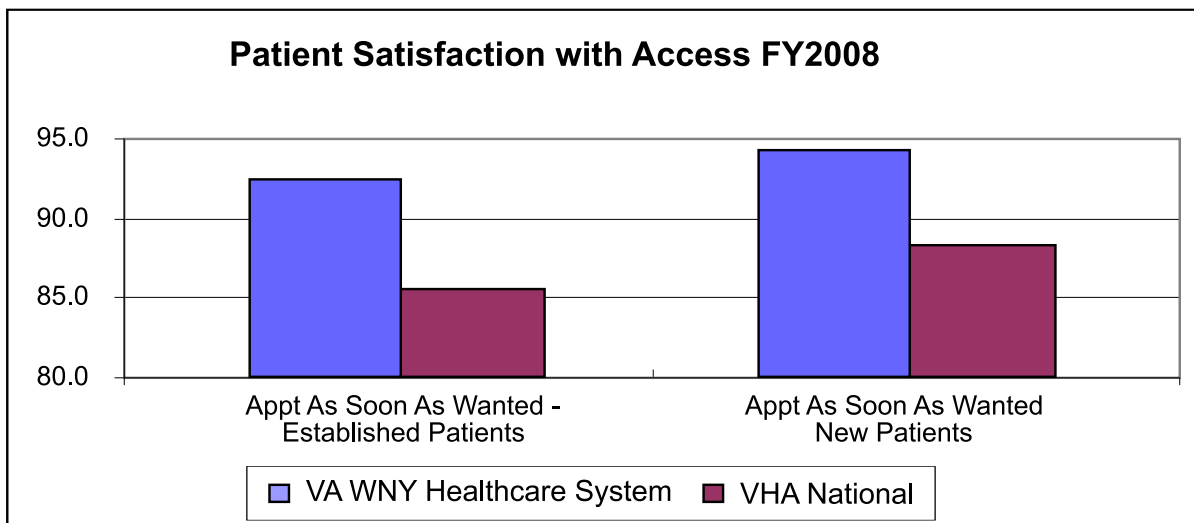
Some of the actions completed to promote Customer Service in 2008 were:

- ♦ Willow Lodge (9A) won the Undersecretary for Health's Unit Level Customer Service Award. This national award was presented to the nurse manager of the unit at a ceremony in Washington, D.C.
- ♦ Mrs. Betty Heigl, a long time volunteer at Buffalo VA, and Linda Sanders, LPN on Pine Lodge in Batavia, were the recipients of Planetree's Spirit of Giving Caregiver Award.
- ♦ Hundreds of staff participated in customer service educational opportunities including over 200 for the greeting program.
- ♦ Scripting lunch-n-learn hosted 32 employees.
- ♦ Focus groups were held with patients, medical residents, OEF/OIF Veterans, families and staff.
- ♦ Over 250 employees provided greeter services at the E-Wing entrance in Buffalo.
- ♦ Soft touch massage program to provide hand massages to the veterans began in Batavia Community Living Center by Call Center employee.
- ♦ 92 VA WNY Managers and Supervisors attended patient centered care leadership retreats and ten facilitators completed 3 days of training provided by a consultant from the Planetree organization. They facilitate the staff retreats in teams of 2.
- ♦ Seven of 39 scheduled patient centered care staff retreats have been completed with over 170 employees participating to date.
- ♦ Monthly patient satisfaction briefings for leadership initiated in June 2008.



The chart above displays Patient Satisfaction Data for Fiscal Year 2008. VA Western New York Healthcare System exceeds the VA National Average in Outpatient Satisfaction by 2.3% and Patient Satisfaction with waiting times (waiting less than 20 minutes past scheduled appointment time) exceeds the National average by 8.3%!

## Access



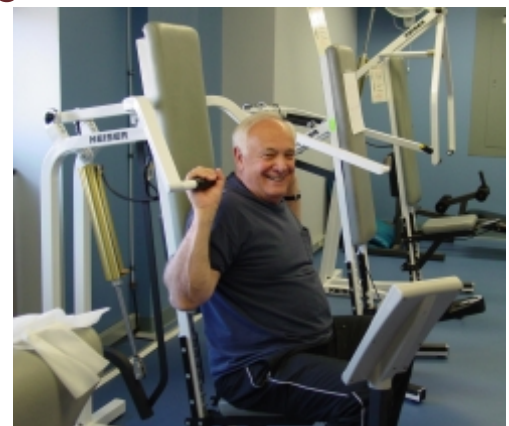
VA Western New York Healthcare System's goal is to provide quality care when veterans want and need it and to have no waits or delays for any appointment. This chart displays Satisfaction with the ability to get an appointment as soon as patients thought they needed it. Nationally, VA facilities reported patients were able to get an appointment when they wanted 86% of the time; in Western New York, 92% or 6% more reported they got an appointment when they thought they needed it. For new patients nationally 87.9% report they are able to get an appointment as soon as they want and in Western New York, 94.4% or 6.5% more got appointments as soon as they wanted.

## Veterans Helping Veterans

A missed opportunity is an appointment a patient cancels after the appointment time or "no shows", the patient did not show up at the scheduled time. Our goal is to provide veterans with quality care when they want and need it and to have no wait or delay for an appointment. WNY continues to decrease our missed opportunity rate. Some of the initiatives in place are reminder telephone calls, both automated and by clerical staff in addition to reminder letters. A TelCare program was recently implemented which will provide veterans with another option to cancel their appointment. TelCare may be reached at 1-888-838-7890. The Center takes calls on weekends, holidays, evenings and nights.

## Cardio-Pulmonary Rehabilitation & Fitness Center Opens In Buffalo

The \$1.2 million project included the renovation and increased space for cardiac rehabilitation and patient therapy on the 4B wing. Veterans who have had open heart surgery, myocardial infarction (heart attack), angioplasty, congestive heart failure, and those who are under medical management for a history of heart and lung diseases utilize the facilities. The fitness center is also available at no cost to all veterans referred by their provider. Pictured exercising is Marine veteran Richard "Doc" D'Amato.



## VA Care, Closer to Home

The ribbon was cut at the new location of the Lockport Community Based Outpatient Clinic at 5883 Snyder Drive in August. The clinic was newly renovated and is dedicated exclusively to veteran care under a contract with CRAssociates. The clinic offers primary care services, specialty services, behavioral health care services, MOVE! (Managing Overweight and/or Obesity Everywhere Program), laboratory services, smoking cessation, and prescription processing. The clinic is handicapped accessible with free parking.



*Niagara Falls Air Force Reserve presents the colors at the ribbon cutting ceremony*



*Lockport VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)*

The Lackawanna Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) contract has been awarded again to Catholic Health Systems. They have been the contract provider since July 2000. We are working with them to open a CBOC satellite office in Springville, NY, in the spring.

The Jamestown CBOC will be under a new contract with Sterling Medical. The new clinic will be located at 610 W 3rd Street, Jamestown, NY 14701. A grand opening will be scheduled in spring 2009.

### **Patients Seen in CBOCs in Fiscal Year 2008**

Olean 2104	Lackawanna 2454
Jamestown 1946	Niagara Falls 1320
Dunkirk 1742	Warsaw 766
Lockport 1060	

Fiscal Year 2008 was a very productive year for the Research Department. In June, 2008 the Human Research Protection Program received a 3-year accreditation from the Association on Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs. This signifies that our Human Research Program is one of the top programs in the United States among major university and Health Care Center programs. Such accreditation ensures that the safety of research participants is the priority of our program.

The Veterinary Medical unit received a 3-year accreditation from the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care. Our program was cited by the accreditation council for maintaining an excellent program and especially for our knowledgeable staff and their commitment to animal care.

VA Western New York research community has had dozens of publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals over the past year. One of the most notable was a major review on newer developments in antibiotic therapy in the treatment of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) which was published in the New England Journal of Medicine by Dr. Sanjay Sethi, chief of Pulmonary Medicine and Dr. Timothy Murphy, Chief of Infectious Diseases.

Dr. Kerry Donnelly of the Psychology staff was awarded a VA grant for ground-breaking research on the evaluation of psychological instruments for assessing Traumatic Brain Injury. This is one of the most common problems of our returning combat troops. Dr. Donnelly's research will help to establish methods for detection of this problem that will lead to earlier interventions.

The Research staff has welcomed 3 new investigators to our department. Steven Fliesler, PhD is the new Vice-chairman of the UB dept. of Ophthalmology in charge of Research. He joins our already prominent ongoing research program in Ophthalmology and will be located in the VA Research building. Dr. Ali El Sohl and Dr. Karin Provost are both new members of the pulmonary department and will be doing clinical work in the intensive care unit and research work in several areas of pulmonary research.

## Patient Education

by Joseph Ilecki

In January 2008, our veterans were introduced to "Ask Me 3?" in our Buffalo Primary Care Clinics. The VA National Center for Patient Safety granted funding for the program, and about 300 veterans participated. College and high school students interacted with veterans in the Primary Care Clinics, where they learned how to ask questions about their health and use their clinic time wisely. "Ask Me 3?" ([http://www.npsf.org/askme3/for\\_patients.php](http://www.npsf.org/askme3/for_patients.php)) invited patients to ask good questions for good health, such as 1) What is my main problem? 2) What do I need to do? and 3) Why is it important for me to do this? The program was a great success for our veteran patients, providers and students, resulting in improvements in our patient satisfaction survey results.

In January 2009, Patient Education will begin a new patient safety initiative, called "Choose to Change" at the Buffalo and Batavia sites. The new program will expand "Ask Me 3?" Students will offer a variety of resources to patients before their Primary Care Clinic appointments.

Patient education resources will include "Ask me 3?", "Speak up", and "Questions are the Answer." The students will use these resources to ask veterans to consider the kind of questions they should ask about topics such as medications, medical tests, new health problems, surgery, health & wellness, etc. to be able to make better health care decisions with their provider and help assure safe care. As part of the program, patients will also be invited to learn about MyHealthVet (<http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>), yet another tool using the computer to enhance their health knowledge.



# Community and Events



## Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom

Honoring our Veterans and Troops – A Family Celebration of Freedom was held Saturday, September 20, 2008 at the Buffalo site. More than 1,500 veterans, families, employees and the community attended the event. Festivities included a car show, musical entertainment, information tables about services available for veterans, and a ceremony featuring keynote speaker Lieutenant Commander Aquilla J. Causey, Naval Officer and Commander of the Military Entrance Processing Station.



## September 11 Commemorative Ceremony and Memorial Walkway Remembrance Ceremony

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 77 pay tribute during a Missing Man Ceremony, and VA Batavia PTSD Peer Support Members hold a Candle Lighting Ceremony to remember those lost on September 11, 2001.

# Community and Events



State University at Buffalo, Mid-Atlantic Conference Champion Head Coach, Turner Gill visits with veterans. Pictured left to right, Turner Gill, veteran Richard Kazinski.



On Veterans Day 2008, Richard Cole sings the Star Spangled Banner, his 30th year at the Buffalo Veterans Day Ceremony.



USS Freedom Sails Into Town  
Officers from the USS Freedom, Naval Warship visit the Buffalo site. Pictured with the officers are Mr. James Cody, then Interim Director and Dr. Patrick Welch, Erie County Veterans Service Officer.



Buffalo Celebrates Navy Week with a performance by American Idol Finalist and Naval Reservist Phil Stacey.



# Awards & Recognition

## Employees of the Month

January - Deborah Medakovich  
February - Colleen Ware-Patrick  
March - Pamela Kaznowski  
April - Brenda Silsby

May - Patricia Bonczyk  
June - Johathan Neubauer  
July - Cheryl McNamara  
August - Nancy Kaszynski  
September - Sandy Arlington

October - Pam Steger  
November - Cynthia Hubler  
December - Susan Busch

## Hands & Heart Award



*Then Interim Director, James Cody presents Miguel Rainstein, MD, with the Hands & Heart Award*

Miguel Rainstein, MD, Chief of Staff, and Pamela Kaznowski, Supervisory Recreation Therapist, received the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Hands and Heart Awards Award, which recognizes and pays tribute to employees who have exhibited characteristics that best exemplify the finest in patient care through the efforts of compassionate, courteous and caring individuals.



*Then Interim Director, James Cody presents Pamela Kaznowski with the Hands & Heart Award*

## Planetree Spirit of Caring Award



Several people from WNY travelled to Chicago in October for the Annual Planetree conference. Mrs. Betty Heigl received Planetree's Spirit of Caring, Caregiver Award in recognition of her contributions to Patient Centered Care at the Buffalo VA. Mrs. Heigl is a long-time volunteer who knits what she calls "prayer shawls" and distributes them to our patients. She not only knits for our veterans but provides her shawls to other Western New York facilities as well. VISN2 sponsored her trip in order to allow her to receive the award in person. Batavia's award winner, Linda Sanders, an LPN on Pine Lodge, was recognized for hosting an annual farm outing for the Pine Lodge dementia patients. She has family and friends there to assist and a full range of staff help with the logistics. Both winners received a beautiful crystal award featuring an engraving of a

sycamore tree, Planetree's well-known logo. Pictured are: front L to R: Cynthia Wilson, Customer Service and Planetree Coordinator; Mrs. Betty Heigl; Deborah Traugott, Mrs. Heigl's daughter and WNY Home Based Primary Care RN. Rear L to R: Brenda Spurling, Nurse Manager of Pine Lodge in Batavia; Donna Todino, retreat facilitator and ultrasound tech at the Buffalo site, and Cynthia Thayer a social worker from the Canandaigua VA.

## Award Recipients - 2008

Evangeline Conley, Public Affairs Officer, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Medaille College's Department of Communication.

Mary Lindberg, Chief, Nutrition and Food Services, received the Under Secretary for Health's Award for Excellence in Nutrition Care Practice

Aimee Stanislawski-Zygaj, MD was recipient of the Briscoli Award for Resident-Faculty Academic Collaboration.

Excellence in Nursing Award recipients were: Louis Pullano, NA on 9A; Elizabeth Bezon, LPN on Pine Lodge; Marcia (Marcy) Groff, staff RN; Kimberly Kwietniewski RN in an expanded role, Nurse Manager Home Based Primary Care.

Cindy Rohe, RN was nominated for Nurse of Distinction and featured in the Buffalo News.

Richard P. Myers, Physician Assistant assigned to surgery, was selected by the Department of the Army Human Resources Command to fill the position of State Surgeon in the New York Army National Guard, the highest medical position of the Army National Guard in New York State.

The Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs, Inc. (AAHRPP) granted full accreditation to the Research Department at VA Western New York Healthcare System, Buffalo.

Federal Woman of the Year Award recipients were Dr. Terri Julian, Program Manager, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Residential Programs; and Judith Kaczmarek, Human Resources.

Veterans' Wellness Advisory Board was given the Award of Excellence in Publications by Veterans Health Administration's Office of Communications.

Elaine Irwin RN, Buffalo, was nominated for the Outstanding Nurses Award by the Professional Nurses Association of WNY, District 1 New York State Nurses Association.

Willow Lodge was recognized for outstanding and innovative approaches to customer service as recipient of the National Under Secretary for Health Customer Service Award.

Dr. Junzhe Xu received the annual Irma Bland Award for excellence in Teaching Residents.

Aimee Stanislawski-Zygaj, MD and Dr. Anselm George received an Outstanding Contributions to the Department of Psychiatry Awards from SUNY Buffalo.

Faith Hoffman received the U.S. Army Freedom Team Salute Commendation.

Visit our Web site at <http://www.buffalo.va.gov>

**Interim Director**  
David J. West, FACHE

**Associate Director**  
Suzanne M. Klinker

**Chief of Staff**  
Miguel Rainstein, MD

**Associate Director for  
Patient/Nursing Services**  
Lizabeth M. Weiss, R.N., C.N.A.

**Assistant Director**  
Dennis Heberling

**Editors**  
Evangeline Conley  
Barbara Sellon

**Editorial Assistants**  
Nancy Evans  
Dennis Heberling  
Joseph Ilecki  
Cynthia Wilson

**Design**  
Barbara Sellon

**Photography**  
Barbara Sellon  
James Sheer  
Evangeline Conley

Vet Gazette is published quarterly by the Office of Public Affairs for the employees and friends of VA Western New York Healthcare System. To submit articles, letters, story ideas, or provide comments, contact Evangeline Conley at (716)862-8753 or [Evangeline.Conley@va.gov](mailto:Evangeline.Conley@va.gov). The editors reserve the right to make edits to any submission chosen for publication.